



What's Hot, What's Not 2008

What experts say about literacy issues

December 2007

During December 2007, 35 professionals from research, policy, practice and the media were interviewed about a range of literacy issues. Interviewees were asked to indicate whether a certain topic was “hot” (i.e. currently a topic of debate and research) or “not hot” (i.e. not currently receiving a lot of attention). In addition, interviewees were asked whether these topics should or should not be a focus of research and debate in 2008. A similar survey has been conducted in the U.S. since 1967. The most recent U.S. findings will be reported by Jack Cassidy in the February/March 2008 issue of *Reading Today*, but this is the first time that the study has been carried out in the UK.

One of the hottest issues by far is phonics (see **Table 1**). However, fewer respondents believed that it should continue to be a focus of attention in 2008. Assessment is another topic that was rated to be “extremely hot” at the moment and most respondents believed that it should continue to be “very hot” in 2008.

There are two topics that our respondents believed should be “extremely hot” in 2008, namely comprehension and reading for pleasure. Other topics that should be “very hot” in 2008 include adolescent literacy, the National Year of Reading, English as a second language, family literacy, social inclusion, informational texts (wider aspects of reading), reading motivation, early years, community-wide approaches, initial teacher training, writing, speaking and listening and parental involvement.

Topics that are rated “not hot” at the moment include comprehension, English as a second language, family literacy, reading for pleasure, informational texts (focus on the wider aspects of reading), reading motivation, reading difficulties and writing. There are several topics that are rated “cold” at the moment; these are reading buddies/mentors, multicultural text, professional staff development, initial teacher training and speaking and listening. According to our respondents, many of these topics should be hotter in 2008 than they are currently. Indeed, there are only two concepts that are thought to be hot but which should not be; these are targets for learners and political/policy influences on literacy.

It is interesting to see that many of the areas that are important to us at the National Literacy Trust, such as family literacy, reading for pleasure, reading motivation, informational texts (focus on the wider aspect of reading) and community-based approaches are not believed to be hot at the moment but that those questioned believed should be in the coming year. Respondents also believed that parental involvement,

Table 1: What's Hot, What's Not in 2008

	What's Hot	What's Not	Should Be hot	Should Not Be Hot
Adolescent literacy (KS 3/4)	■		■ ■	
Comprehension		■	■ ■ ■	
Targets for learners	■ ■			■
Assessment	■ ■ ■		■ ■	
National Year of Reading	■		■ ■	
Early intervention	■ ■		■ ■	
English as second language		■	■ ■	
Family literacy		■	■ ■	
Social inclusion	■		■ ■	
Gender issues	■ ■		■	
Reading for pleasure		■	■ ■ ■	
Informational texts		■	■ ■	
Reading buddies		■ ■		
Reading motivation		■	■ ■	
Multicultural text		■ ■	■	
New literacies			■ ■	
Popular culture	■		■	
Phonics	■ ■ ■		■	
Political/policy influences	■ ■			■
Early years	■		■ ■	
Prof. staff development		■ ■	■	
Reading difficulties		■	■	
Reading interventions	■		■ ■	
Community-wide approaches		■	■ ■	
Struggling/gifted readers		■	■	
Initial teacher training		■ ■	■ ■	
Personalised learning	■		■	
Writing		■	■ ■	
Speaking and listening		■ ■	■ ■	
Adult basic skills			■	
Parental involvement	■		■ ■	

Key

- indicates that more than 50% of respondents were in agreement ("hot" or "not hot")
- ■ indicate that at least 75% of respondents were in agreement ("very hot" or "cold")
- ■ ■ indicate that all of the respondents were in agreement ("extremely hot" or "extremely cold")

early years, reading interventions, social inclusion and adolescent topics are currently “hot” but should be hotter topics in 2008.

The survey

As mentioned above, this is the first time that this survey has been conducted in the UK. Jack Cassidy shared the interview schedule that had been used in the US this year and we made minor changes to adapt it to the UK context. 35 professionals were interviewed by phone. Following the U.S. methodology, each respondent was read a standard 181-word paragraph that defines what is meant by “hot” and “not hot”. It also explained that their ratings of “hot” or “not hot” do not necessarily reflect their own personal interest, or lack thereof, in a given topic.

After this introductory paragraph, each respondent was asked to rate a given topic as “hot” or “not hot”. Then each respondent was asked if the topic “should be hot” or “should not be hot”. The main criterion for selection was a good knowledge of literacy trends and issues at the national and international level. In assembling our list, we tried to have a diverse range of professions represented. Professionals interviewed for this survey included Mike Baker, Liz Chamberlain, Kevin Collins, Pie Corbett, Teresa Cremin, Christine Doddington, Tristan Donovan, Prue Goodwin, Gayle Gorman, Hilary Hodgson, Phil Jarrett, Marilyn Joyce, Nick Hilborne, Sue Palmer, Joel Rickett, Martin Rogers, Jim Rose, Sally Rundell, Peter Silva, Huw Thomas, Alastair Thomson, Liz Thomson, and Mick Waters.

What's Hot, What's Not in 2008 (actual percentages)

	What's Hot	What's Not	Should Be Hot	Should Not Be Hot
Adolescent literacy (KS 3/4)	62.9	34.3	80.0	17.1
Comprehension	28.6	65.7	97.1	2.9
Targets for learners	82.9	17.1	42.9	57.1
Assessment	97.1	0.0	91.4	8.6
National Year of Reading	65.7	34.3	91.4	8.6
Early intervention	85.7	14.3	82.9	11.4
English as second language	37.1	62.9	85.7	14.3
Family literacy	42.9	57.1	77.1	22.9
Social inclusion	60.0	40.0	85.7	14.3
Gender issues	80.0	20.0	65.7	34.3
Reading for pleasure	45.7	54.3	97.1	2.9
Informational texts	20.0	74.3	77.1	22.9
Reading buddies	17.1	82.9	45.7	45.7
Reading motivation	25.7	65.7	71.4	20.0
Multicultural text	8.6	88.6	68.6	31.4
New literacies	48.6	45.7	80.0	20.0
Popular culture	60.0	37.1	62.9	34.3
Phonics	100.0	0.0	65.7	34.3
Political/policy influences	77.1	22.9	34.3	65.7
Early years	74.3	25.7	88.6	11.4
Prof. staff development	20.0	77.1	74.3	22.9
Reading difficulties	37.1	62.9	74.3	25.7
Reading interventions	51.4	42.9	80.0	17.1
Community approaches	22.9	71.4	85.7	14.3
Struggling/gifted readers	45.7	51.4	62.9	37.1
Initial teacher training	8.6	88.6	80.0	17.1
Personalised learning	74.3	22.9	57.1	37.1
Writing	34.3	60.0	91.4	2.9
Speaking and listening	17.1	77.1	91.4	2.9
Adult basic skills	45.7	45.7	71.4	20.0
Parental involvement	60.0	25.7	85.7	5.7

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